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NEWS

Town Meeting passes Winchester's $163 million FY26 budget

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

May 6, 2025 . 1:00 PM — 5 min read

Winchester Town Meeting works through the fiscal year 2026 budget during its third session on May 5. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Town Meeting voted to approve the fiscal year 2026 budget in its t session Monday evening, as it turned its attention from bylaws to

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Town Moderator Philip Frattaroli took the budget out of order, adding Town Meeting would return to the warrant order at its fourth session on May 8. The evening will include the Committee on Government Regulations articles updating town bylaws.

Town Meeting on May 1 adjourned while debating Article 38, which asks the body to reorganize how it does business, moving from Robert's Rules of Order to Town Meeting Time, among other items.

Town Moderator Philip Frattaroli opens Town Meeting on May 5 by taking the FY26 budget out of order. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

On May 5, the body moved quickly through Article 28, which asked for $455,000 from free cash to support the School Department's early childhood literacy pilot program. After a short debate, Town Meeting voted overwhelmingly in support.

Town Meeting then moved onto Article 22, the town budget, known as the "yellow sheet." The current fiscal year ends June 30.

Due to an 18.92% increase in health insurance costs earlier this y officials have been scrambling to find a solution to a more than $2 million

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deficit.

Finance Committee Chair Jeff Calabrese said the town has come up with a way to solve the FY26 deficit by using free cash, among other solutions. However, he added it's not a preferable method because it could change Winchester's bond rating and then the town will see its interest rates be higher when borrowing money.

Calabrese recommended Winchester start looking at its incoming revenue as well as its spending. He said he recommended the schools seek alternative solutions to funding.

CAM
GOVERNMENT
What was FinCom's FY26 Operating *Starting Point*?
This Starting Point for FY26 put the Town of Winchester on a path to allocate ~33% of all Reserves or Free Cash within 7 months
YoY Starting Point Growth
Revenue - 3.65%
Municipal - 2.8%
Schools - 7.15%
Health Insurance - 18.9%
Operating Deficit
~(4.52M)
Capital Deficit
~(13M)

Finance Committee Chair Jeff Calabrese explains the FY26 budget. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

During a long debate over the proposed $70 million School Department budget, Town Meeting members went back and forth over whether they supported the line item. Calabrese pointed out the School Department takes up 87% of the town's revenue while the town itself only uses 18%.

Calabrese said if Winchester removed all the health insurance is… every other financial problem, the community would still be in a deficit

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because of the demanding school budget.

Despite the debate, a $70.4 million school budget was passed with $1.7 million in free cash to make up the difference in its nearly 7% increase.

The rest of the budget was quickly voted on, with the final number coming in at over $163 million.

That number includes more than $13 million for the Water and Sewer Enterprise Fund and $2.4 million for the Recreation Enterprise Fund, Articles 23 and 24, respectively.

Other articles

Article 25 was passed in a voice vote. The article appropriated $30,000 from the Building Stabilization Fund to pay for a new energy efficient boiler at the Muraco School, which was installed in 2012.

Calabrese said FY26 is the final year for the boiler payment.

Article 27 asked Town Meeting for $149,000 to fund the Health Reimbursement Arrangement program titled "Employee Health Care Mitigation Fund."

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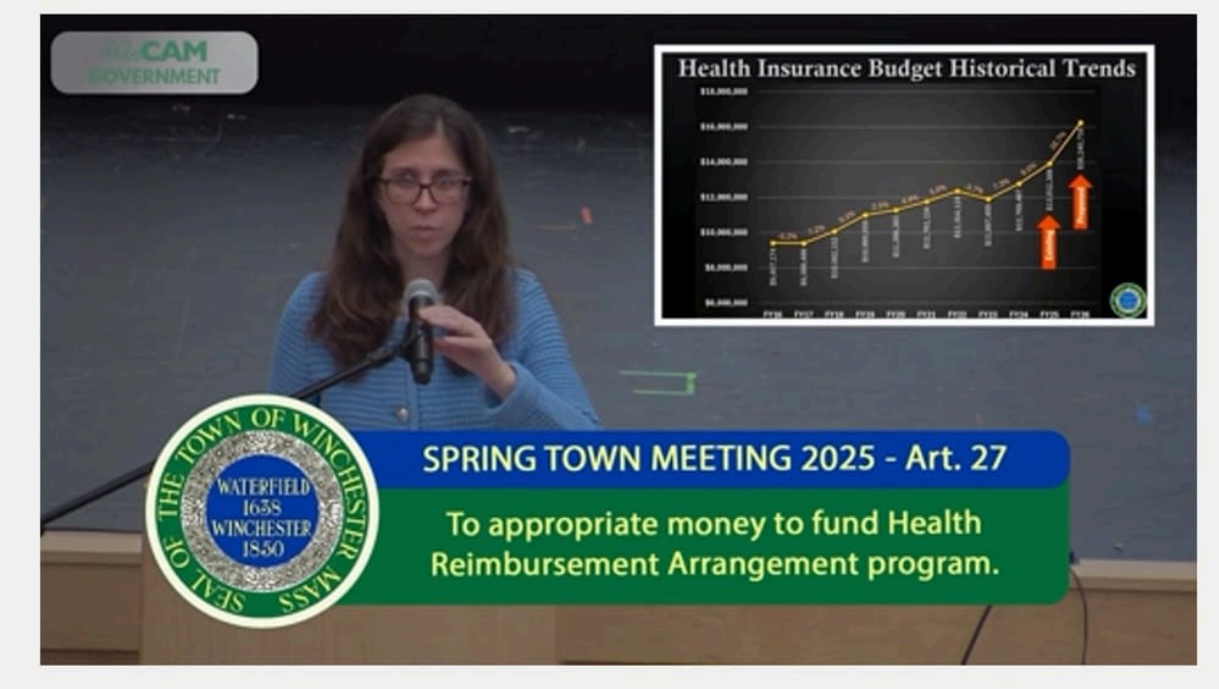
Health Insurance Budget Historical Trends
SPRING TOWN MEETING 2025 - Art. 27
To appropriate money to fund Health Reimbursement Arrangement program.

Town Manager Beth Rudolph explains the increase in health insurance for the town. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Town Manager Beth Rudolph said the town was shocked earlier this year when its healthcare provider proposed an 18.92% increase in active employee insurance and for non-Medicare eligible retirees for FY26.

The increase was more than 90% of what the town had expected, Rudolph said, forcing Winchester officials to look at serious cost savings in other areas of the budget.

The Select Board in early March voted to implement Chapter 32b under Mass. General Law to allow the town to restructure health insurance by picking the most common package, the state's Group Insurance Commission.

The move saved Winchester about $600,000.

Rudolph said the town worked with the Public Employee Committee, the committee representing the school and municipal unions, put aside 25%, or $149,000, to reimburse subscribers for increased out-of-pocke to the healthcare changes.

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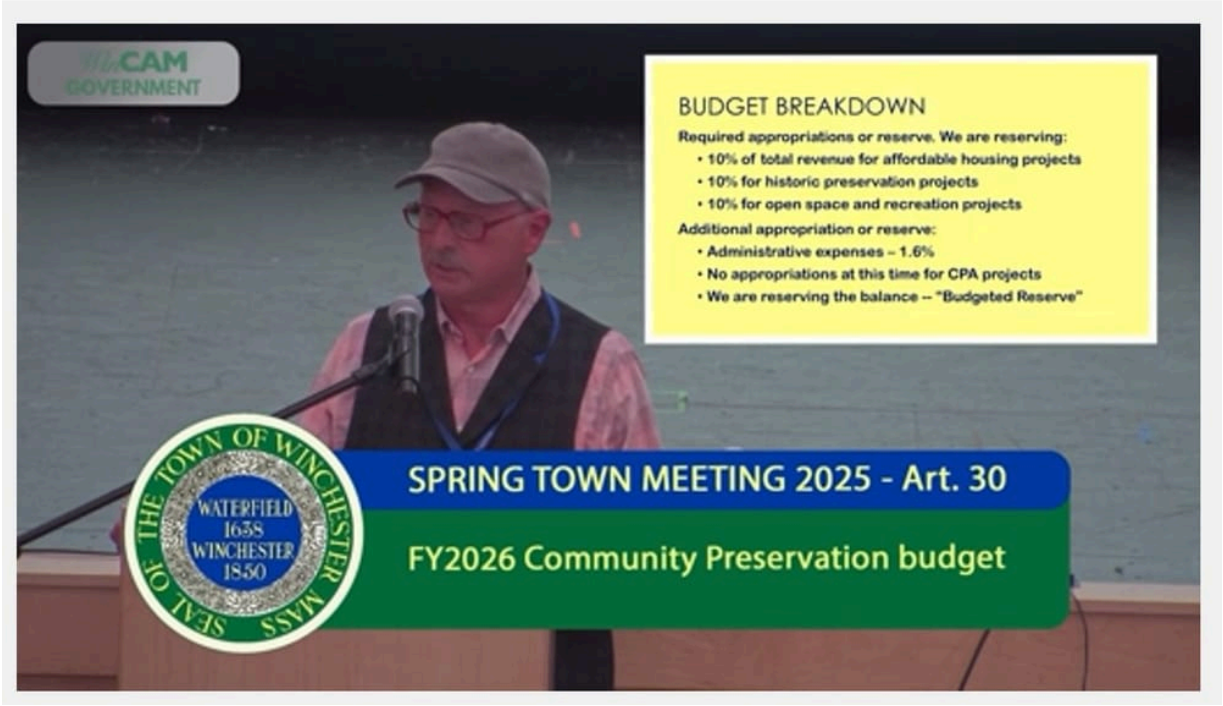
This is the second time Winchester has employed this statute. Rudolph said there was still $36,000 in the fund from last time, which will be added to the $149,000.

Precinct 8 member Diab Jerius said while it's great Winchester was able to find a solution, going for the most commonly selected plan affects town employees.

"I hope they get the coverage they deserve," he said.

Town Meeting voted to support the measure.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GOVERNMENT
BUDGET BREAKDOWN
Required appropriations or reserve. We are reserving:
• 10% of total revenue for affordable housing projects
• 10% for historic preservation projects
• 10% for open space and recreation projects
Additional appropriation or reserve:
• Administrative expenses – 1.6%
• No appropriations at this time for CPA projects
• We are reserving the balance -- "Budgeted Reserve"
SPRING TOWN MEETING 2025 - Art. 30
FY2026 Community Preservation budget
THE TOWN OF WINCHESTER MASS
WATERFIELD 1638 WINCHESTER 1850

WCCP Chair David Miller explains the CPA budget breakdown. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Article 30 was the final measure voted Monday evening. The article asked Town Meeting to reserve 5% from the Community Preservation Fund for administrative costs.

Winchester Committee on Community Preservation (WCCP) Cha
Miller said the town is required by law to put 10% into each of thr

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categories: open space and recreation, affordable housing and historic preservation.

The leftover 70% can be redistributed in any amount to any or all of those three categories.

Winchester in November 2024 voted to accept the Community Preservation Act, which adds a 1.5% surcharge to property bills. The state is expected to match Winchester, but not for the first year.

Miller said the committee is currently going through the process of how to make everything work. He previously told Town Meeting during its first meeting April 28 that the WCCP would be bringing applications to the body next spring.

Select Board Chair Michelle Prior, however, said the town has several projects the WCCP could start looking at, including 160 Forest St., which ticks two of the CPA boxes: affordable housing and preservation.

She said if the WCCP waits until next year, there will be approximately $2.2 million sitting in the fund before anything gets off the ground.

Miller said the committee wants to make sure the process is transparent and equitable, which is why the WCCP wants to make sure there is a process everyone can follow.

He added the committee would examine the idea of any projects that could be done in the meantime and brought before Town Meeting this fall.

"No promises," Miller said.

Town Meeting voted to support the measure.

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Town Meeting is expected to meet in its final session on Thursday, May 8 at Winchester High School auditorium, beginning at 6:30 p.m.

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

March 4, 2026

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NEWS

Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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NEWS

Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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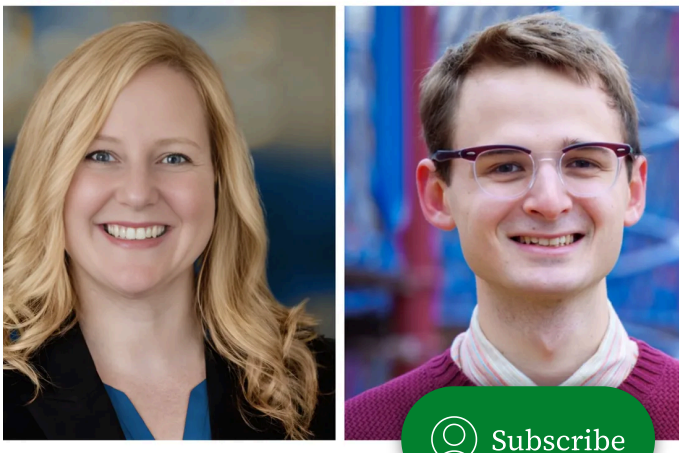

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

March 4, 2026

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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March 4, 2026

FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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